

University of New Hampshire University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository

Media Relations

Administrative Offices

1-15-2013

UNH Prof: For Children in Military Families, Grief Often Misunderstood

Beth Potier

UNH Media Relations

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholars.unh.edu/news>

Recommended Citation

Potier, Beth, "UNH Prof: For Children in Military Families, Grief Often Misunderstood" (2013). *UNH Today*. 4134.
<https://scholars.unh.edu/news/4134>

This News Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Administrative Offices at University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Media Relations by an authorized administrator of University of New Hampshire Scholars' Repository. For more information, please contact nicole.hentz@unh.edu.

Media Relations

January 15, 2013

UNH Prof: For Children in Military Families, Grief Often Misunderstood

DURHAM, N.H. – As U.S. military involvement in Iraq and Afghanistan begins its second decade, more than two million children of military families are currently affected by war. New research from a University of New Hampshire social work professor explores the unique grief responses of these children, providing guidelines for military families in different cycles of deployment.

“We’ve never had a war in our country where soldiers were deployed six, seven, eight times. We’re just beginning to learn what implications this has on families and children,” says Pablo Arriaza, assistant professor of social work at UNH and the author of “Grief Among Children of Military Families,” published recently in the Illinois Child Welfare Journal.

Arriaza and co-author Kerri Cornelissen, who completed her master of social work degree at UNH in 2011, discuss the grief reactions of children in the context of ongoing and frequent deployments. The authors caution that labeling children as resilient in an attempt to normalize grief reactions can lead to suppressing feelings and a delayed grief response.

“When a child has experienced three, four, five deployments, that ongoing grief becomes complicated. It’s almost disrespectful to call them ‘resilient.’ We’re not allowing them to feel what they need to be feeling,” Arriaza says.

The authors also recommend interventions specific to the various stages of deployment: pre-deployment, deployment, and reunion. Drawing on expressive therapies, support systems, and open and genuine communication, interventions should consider the child’s unique needs, says Arriaza, yet most research on this subject sees children only in the context of the family.

“How do you explain to a four-year-old that daddy’s going to be back in 14 months?” he says.

“The anticipation of welcoming home a deployed parent is often, and quickly, replaced with the expectation that they will soon be deploying again,” says Arriaza, calling these repeated deployments unprecedented. “In a sense, children of military parents do not have the opportunity to process and work through the initial grief of a parent’s deployment, because that same parent may soon be deploying again.”

Arriaza notes that in New Hampshire, where a disproportionately large number of those deployed are in the National Guard, military families face unique challenges. Because those in the National Guard do not live on military bases and hold “civilian” jobs, they may not find ready support for issues of ongoing deployment.

Arriaza spent 16 years as a civilian social worker in the U.S. armed forces working with military families; he’s watched the stresses on families and children shift as the demands of our current wars

have increased. He continues to work in the summers with children, daycare workers, and therapists in military institutions throughout Europe. Before Sept. 11, 2001, he says, his work was preventative. "Now it's more like putting a Band-Aid on a wound that's persistently open. Things are getting more chronic for military families," he says.

The University of New Hampshire, founded in 1866, is a world-class public research university with the feel of a New England liberal arts college. A land, sea, and space-grant university, UNH is the state's flagship public institution, enrolling 12,200 undergraduate and 2,300 graduate students.

-30-

Media Contact: [Beth Potier](#) | 603-862-1566 | UNH Media Relations | [@unhnews](#)

UNH Experts available for comment:

- [Pablo Arriaza](#)

Copyright © 2018, The University of New Hampshire • Durham, NH 03824 • UNH main directory: (603) 862-1234.

[Media Relations](#) is a unit of [Communications & Public Affairs](#) which is a division of University Advancement.

[ADA Acknowledgement](#) | [Contact the Webmaster](#) | [UNH Today](#) | [UNH Social Media Index](#)